

REMARKS

In a non-final office action dated February 26, 2002, the Examiner withdrew the finality of the previous office action dated 8/20/02, and rejected claims 1-18 under 35 U.S.C. §103(a) as obvious over Knudson et al. (US 5,765,140) in view of Nakaoka (US 6,092,048).¹

Applicants have made certain clarifying amendments to independent claims 1, 8 and 15. The changes to the independent claims required certain changes to dependent claims 2, 5, 9, 12, 17 and 18 for consistency. In particular, the independent claims are amended to clarify the nature of a "task" as an action which is performed by the computer system with respect to one or more data objects, and to further clarify that defining a project tracking interface means generating a data object which specifies the interface as a set of task selections from a pre-defined set of task actions. As amended, the claims are patentable over the cited art.

In the Appeal Brief filed herein and in response to the initial office action, applicants explained the significance of their invention and the *Knudson* reference. The remarks made therein are still germane, and are incorporated herein by reference without necessarily repeating verbatim everything said therein. The additional remarks herein address the significance of the newly cited *Nakaoka* reference.

To briefly summarize, applicants' invention is intended to provide an improved user interface for complex, multi-user project management. In many such projects, each user belongs to a group of one or more users, each group performing some subset of the project work. Thus

¹ The cover sheet accompanying the present office action indicates in a checked box that the office action is final. However, the body of the action indicates that the finality of the previous action is withdrawn, with no further indication that the present action is final. The Examiner confirmed by telephone on May 24, 2004 that the present action is non-final.

subsets of functions performed by each group may overlap considerably, but no two groups are identical. For example, each group may share a common need to access a common database and perform certain standard functions in relation thereto. Other functions may be particular to a single group of users or to some subset of all the groups. Applicants have further observed that in some cases different groups have a different terminology for the same task.

Most conventional project tracking systems provide a standard interface or set of interfaces which may be considered a logical “OR” of the user interface requirements of each separate group, in the sense that any function required by at least one of the user groups is available to all in the standard interface. As a result, all supported functions are presented to a given group of users, even though some of the functions might only be used by other groups.

Applicants provide an interface which is customized to each group, and thus easier for the users in that group of understand and use. According to applicants’ preferred embodiment, an interface definition (which is a data object) is created for each group, the definition specifying the task selections which are to be presented in an interactive interface for that group. The interface definition optionally includes other features, such as a task description which can be customized to each group. Such a custom user interface is a subset of a standard user interface for all groups, in the sense that it provides access to some subset of the functions available to all user groups, the subset being those functions needed by the corresponding group. The standard interface preferably remains available to all users, while the custom interface for the user’s group is an optional interface available to all users in the group.

It will be observed that applicant’s interface definitions are themselves mere data which do not perform a function without an interface generator or similar function to generate the interactive interface from the interface definition files. The capability to generate a custom interface from group-specific data is a significant feature of applicants’ invention.

Knudson discloses a “project management system”, in which tasks to be performed, schedules, funding and similar information are tracked in a database, and this information is displayable to a user. *Knudson* discloses that different personnel associated with a project might have different schedules and different tasks to perform. However, the *interface* presented to each user is the same. I.e., *Knudson* does not disclose different interfaces associated with different groups of users.

Nakaoka is in many respects similar to *Knudson*. *Nakaoka* discloses a “task support system” which maintains records of tasks performed and to be performed, responsible individuals, status, and so forth. According to *Nakaoka*, conventional workflow management systems typically define tasks at the beginning of a project, before work is performed. However, in some cases the tasks to be performed depend on the outcome of some previously performed tasks, and therefore can’t be defined initially. *Nakaoka* provides an “event rule” mechanism, whereby conditional tasks can be added and tracked, depending on the results of other tasks.

In its essential features, *Nakaoka* discloses little or nothing beyond *Knudson*. The purpose of *Nakaoka*’s system is to record the progress of a complex project. According to *Nakaoka*, task information, such as status, responsible individuals, and so forth, is displayed to the user. *Nakaoka* also discloses that different users may be responsible for the performance of different tasks. However, *Nakaoka* does not disclose any form of customizable interface, whereby different groups of users associated with a project are presented with different interactive interfaces containing different subsets of task selections from a larger set of task actions.

Both *Knudson* and *Nakaoka* refer to “tasks”, which is possibly causing some confusion with respect to applicants’ claims. In order to help clarify the distinction between applicants’ invention and the *Knudson/Nakaoka* line of references, applicants have amended the independent claims herein to further define the nature of tasks and task selections. As used by applicants, a

“task” is an action which is *performed by the computer system on one or more data objects*. I.e., it is equivalent to a function, called procedure, or program. It is not some external action (such as “go on a business trip”) which is recorded in a database. According to applicants’ invention, the selection of the task from the customizable interface presented to the user causes the corresponding task action to be performed with respect to the corresponding one or more data objects.

Applicants have further sought to clarify the claims by amending independent claims 1 and 8 to recite “generating ... a respective project tracking interface *definition ... being a data object* defining a respective set of task selections...” for each group. This change is intended to clarify that the interface is something which is rendered from a data object, such as a file, which effectively defines the interface. A different definition can be created for each group, thus resulting in different respective interfaces. Independent claim 15 already recited a “definition”, and is amended only to clarify that the definition is a data object.

As explained previously, both *Knudson* and *Nakaoka* disclose that information about work performed or to be performed is displayed to a user. But this information is mere data, and does not constitute an interactive interface. I.e., it does not constitute a list of functions which are invoked responsive to selection by the user. *Nakaoka* does disclose that selection of a “task” results in particular information concerning the task to be displayed, in a hierarchical fashion. This amounts to the same action (display of task particular information) being performed every time a task is selected.

As used by applicants, “task” has a specific narrower meaning of some function performed by the computer system, and an interactive interface is a display of user selectable task actions in this sense, which, when selected, cause the corresponding action to be performed by the computer

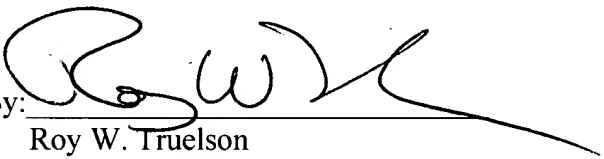
system. Furthermore, as claimed by applications, this interactive interface is customizable to different groups of users by generating customized data object definitions.

Although *Knudson* and *Nakaoka* both disclose that different users perform different tasks, this is a well known fact. There is no suggestion in the references, alone or in combination, to create *customizable user interfaces* of different subsets of task selections for different groups of users, as recited in applicants' claims. For these and all other reasons stated previously herein, applicants' claims are patentable over the cited art.

In view of the foregoing, applicants submit that the claims are now in condition for allowance and respectfully request reconsideration and allowance of all claims. In addition, the Examiner is encouraged to contact applicants' attorney by telephone if there are outstanding issues left to be resolved to place this case in condition for allowance.

Respectfully submitted,

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